

Origin of the SIGINT Support Groups February 12

President Dwight Eisenhower had a major effect on the growth and development of the Intelligence Community (IC), including NSA. He is not generally remembered for this, since the issues were secret in the first place, and, moreover, Eisenhower's style was to work as much as possible behind the scenes. As a career military officer, Eisenhower also preferred to proceed through staff work; his usual method for deciding about changes was to commission a study and then make decisions based on the study's findings.



Lyman Kirkpatrick

The Kirkpatrick Committee was convened toward the end of the Eisenhower administration to study the question of centralizing the IC. Eisenhower felt the community was fragmenting and that intelligence was not getting to consumers who needed it. The committee began work in early 1960, charged with completing its tasks before Eisenhower would leave office in January 1961; the chairman was Lyman Kirkpatrick, inspector general at the CIA.

The Kirkpatrick Committee made 43 major recommendations. Its major points affecting all agencies were a radical reorganization of the U.S. Intelligence Board and creation of an IC staff, subordinate to the Director of Central Intelligence.

Many recommendations affected NSA indirectly as part of the IC, but one recommendation specifically altered NSA's way of doing business. The Kirkpatrick Committee concluded that the then method of distributing communications intelligence (COMINT) to military commands or civilian agencies, the Special Security Officer (SSO) system, was outmoded and tended to restrict use of a valuable national resource.

The SSO system, in fact, was World War II vintage and had been modeled on the way the British handled COMINT before and during the war. The COMINT production group forwarded product to a special security officer in response to standing requirements at a particular command; the SSO would distribute the product to those cleared for it at that location.

As a result of the Kirkpatrick recommendations, NSA established the first Cryptologic Support Groups (CSGs). The CSGs were not to be merely passive transmission belts for product whenever it was received. They were to be active and interactive with their commands or agencies, first in obtaining the COMINT their host said it needed, then helping the recipients interpret it, and then helping the host determine further COMINT needs. This began a revolutionary and evolutionary process of improving ways in which NSA dealt with its customers.

508 caption: a three-quarters portrait of a man wearing a suit.